

### Do you always get what you give? A mixed-methods approach to reciprocity within the informal (trans)national social protection networks of migrants

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## Abstract

This study focuses on the importance of reciprocity in migrants' protective social networks. It uses Marshall Sahlins' concepts of generalized, balanced, and unbalanced (negative) reciprocity for empirical analysis of different logics of distribution of social protection. The findings are based on a sample of migrants from Kazakhstan and Poland who are living in Germany. The study was conducted using a convergent parallel mixed-methods approach that involves different types of data (from interviews and egocentric networks) and different methods of data analysis. The results indicate a variety of different logics of reciprocity and show the crucial role of reciprocity in the distribution of informal social protection. In addition, this paper shows that the transnationality of a network does not influence this general norm of reciprocity, although quantitative and qualitative findings indicate the prevalence and favoritism, respectively, of certain allocation types of protection across borders.

## 1. Introduction

The notion that reciprocity is a universal mechanism for social exchange, cohesion, and support is well established in various social sciences, such as anthropology, sociology, and economics. Even though scholars have also discussed the influence of migration on reciprocal exchange, some recent research has been conducted in one specific field of exchange: migrants' transnational protective networks. Multi-sited and network-oriented scholars have described the crucial role of reciprocity in migrants' social protection in fields such as care and financial support and in social inequalities (Dietz et al. 2011; Dankyi, Mazzucato, and Manuh 2015; Faist et al. 2015). Migrants' networks are often characterized according to the spatial proximity of relevant others who provide or receive social assistance (e.g., family and friends in the home and host countries), one example being the effect of distance on the organization of care for the elderly or children, as has been broadly discussed in the literature on transnational care. (For an overview, see Baldassar and Merla 2014.) The life of migrants "here and there"—the "transnationalism from below" (Guarnizo and Smith 1998), in which different groups, fields (Glick Schiller and Fouron 1999), and spaces (Faist 1999) are connected through ideas, circuits, or groups such as entrepreneurs or religious associations—can be regarded as a resource for, but also as a restriction on, the distribution of informal social protection.

Research on migration and transnationalism has shown that actors often interpret narratives of reciprocity as repayment of a debt to family members in their home countries who had previously provided assistance in different realms of social protection (Smith 1998; Taylor, Wangaruro, and Papadopoulos 2012; Strunk 2014). Migration scholars also emphasize the role of asymmetrical reciprocity in transnational patronage (Rahmonova-Schwarz 2012), non-reciprocal sponsorship (Lever-Tracy and Holton 2001), and Polanyi's concept of reciprocity when studying power inequalities (Safuta and Degavre 2013). Recently, the role of reciprocity in informal social protection in migration studies was explored through qualitative case studies (see Barglowski, Krzyżowski, and Świątek 2015; Bilecen, Çatır, and Orhon 2015; Sienkiewicz, Sadovskaya, and Amelina 2015). This work has revealed the importance of reciprocity in informal social protection as a master mechanism involved in activities, strategies, and the meaning given to such protection (Faist and Bilecen 2015). What remains unexplored, however, is the quantitative impact of reciprocity in social protection within and across borders.

This paper contributes to this discussion by examining the type and degree of reciprocity in social networks using a mixed-methods social networks study design (see Bernardi 2011) and by combining social networks analysis with semi-structured interviews in a matched sample (see Mazzucato 2009). By using different data and methods, this study revealed a multifaceted, complementary picture of the different types of reciprocity prevalent in transnational networks of support. This enabled us not only to study migrants' perceptions of reciprocity in the social protections exchanged across borders, but also to measure the quantitative impact of reciprocity, which has remained unexplored until now.

To achieve these goals, the theory of social protection and reciprocity was applied to the analysis, as described in the following section, which is followed by an introduction to the research design, methodology, and operationalization. The empirical part of this paper presents the qualitative findings with regard to generalized, balanced, and negative reciprocity in (trans)national social protection. This is then followed by a discussion of the descriptive networks and quantitative multivariate analysis, which was guided by two questions: (1) "How reciprocal are the networks?" and (2) "How can reciprocity explain informal social protection provided and received within social networks?" The final part provides a summary of the findings and of the implications concerning reciprocity within protective networks.

## 2. Social protection

"Social protection" became a key term in organizations involved in development, such as the United Nations, the World Bank, and the International Labour Organization, being described as "all public and private initiatives that provide income or consumption transfers to the poor, protect the vulnerable against livelihood risks, and enhance the social status and rights of the marginalised" (Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler 2004, iii). In the area of international migration, social protection is important for the (re)production of inequalities (Faist and Bilecen 2015). Outside such organizations, the term is used to describe "strategies to cope with social risks arising in capitalist economies in fields such as employment, health, care and education" (Faist 2013, 3), which include informal protection (provided mostly in networks) and formal protection (provided by the state, institutions, or organizations).

Because social networks play a major role in social protection, social protection can also be understood as a differentiated part of "social capital." Trust, solidarity, and different types of reciprocity are crucial not only for social capital (Putnam 1995; Massey and Espinosa 1997; Faist 1998) but also for social protection. However, critiques of Putnam's concept of social

capital as both a cause and an effect draw particular attention to a thoughtful interpretation of this factor (Portes 2000). It is also important to carefully interpret social protection because of its being embedded in formal and informal structures. In addition, the possibility of multiple frames of reference makes local and migratory contexts highly relevant to informal social protection practices of migrants, who may be either advanced or restricted by different national circumstances (e.g., because of tax benefits, lack of recognition of qualifications, institutional discrimination). In contrast to formal protection, which is often limited to a single nation state in protecting against life risk in health, employment, and education, networks of informal social protection can be transnational, especially in migratory contexts. Recent work on networks has stated the important role of transnationality for social protection and support (Bilecen and Sienkiewicz 2015; Herz 2015). In this paper, quantitative findings about reciprocity in social networks of informal social protection will be framed within a complementary picture by including information from qualitative interviews and document analysis concerning migrants' formal entitlements in their home and host countries.

### 3. Reciprocity

Sociological and anthropological theory refers to reciprocity mostly in the context of non-market exchange. Reciprocity is a fundamental concept of social action and social exchange not only in sociology (Simmel 1908; Gouldner 1960; Blau 1964) but also in social anthropology and is also often described as the norm of reciprocity. The early work of Malinowski (1922) and Mauss (1966 [1925]) brought this concept to prominence through their inquiry into the nexus of social exchange, reciprocity, and social obligations. In economics, the role of exchange and redistribution in the emergence of economic systems became considerable (see in particular Polanyi's work [1957]). Reciprocity, in combination with the concept of game theory, is principal for rational choice theory, which today is used as a cross-disciplinary theory to explain human behavior, social action, and decision-making processes. Because of its elementary and cross-sectional character, reciprocity can be easily integrated into and is useful for the theoretical foundation of many studies, although its universality can also make it "meaningless" (Graeber 2001).

To avoid this problem and make the concept meaningful, this article uses Marshall Sahlins' definition of reciprocity. Sahlins is an anthropologist who conceived of three types of reciprocity—generalized, balanced, and negative reciprocity—based on the work of Marcel Mauss and Claude Lévi-Strauss. In his book *Stone Age Economics* (1972), Sahlins defined generalized reciprocity as "transactions that are putatively altruistic, transactions on the line

of assistance given and, if possible and necessary, assistance returned” (Sahlins 1972, 193–194). Generalized reciprocity does not involve the expectation of material return or a definite idea (in terms of time, quality, and quantity) of reciprocal help in return, which makes its connotation rather diffuse (Ibid.). Balanced reciprocity refers to direct exchange. “In precise balance, the reciprocation is the customary equivalent of the thing received and is without delay” (Sahlins 1972, 194). The exchange might be understood more loosely in terms of the worth and periods of exchange than in its definition; compared with generalized reciprocity, balanced reciprocity is less personal (Sahlins 1972, 194–195). Negative reciprocity describes “the attempt to get something for nothing with impunity” (Sahlins 1972, 195) and is the most impersonal sort of exchange.<sup>1</sup> These three types of reciprocity are narrow enough to be distinct, with comparatively little overlap, but are also broad enough for empirical operationalization and matching with existing network data on informal social protection. In this article, Sahlins’ ideas about reciprocity have been used to analyze whether these forms of reciprocity work in networks of informal social protection and to determine what reciprocity means for transnational informal social protection.

#### 4. Multi-sited and mixed-methods research design

In 2012 and 2013, surveys were conducted among 100 migrants from Poland and 100 migrants from Kazakhstan who were living in Germany—two groups that have different legal status and migration histories. The surveys involved 200 ego-centered network questionnaires designed to determine social protections both received and provided within these networks. The migrants from Kazakhstan were predominantly of German origin, and most of them migrated to Germany as ethnic German resettlers along with their whole families and sometimes even whole villages, acquiring German citizenship upon their arrival. The group of migrants from Poland also included some German resettlers, but the migration pattern in the Polish–German space was more heterogeneous, including seasonal workers and the reunification of family members. These migrants are citizens of the European Union and thus enjoy the freedom of movement for workers, among other rights.

The participants were given the choice of completing the questionnaire in German, Russian, or Polish. All network questionnaires were filled out under direct, face-to-face conditions with interviewers who spoke German and Russian or German and Polish fluently. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with 20 migrants each from Kazakhstan and from Poland in addition to the larger network questionnaire sample. The sampling strategy consisted of a combination of snowball sampling (for the 40 participants who were interviewed) and quota



sampling (for the other 160 participants). The rationale behind the quota sampling strategy was to obtain a much more heterogeneous sample within the two migrant groups in terms of gender, age, and education. This is why the data represent neither the general nor the specific migrant population, but rather offer insights into the patterns of social protection in networks without necessarily claiming to be representative.

For the quantitative part of the research project, we used social network analysis to collect all relevant information about the egos, alteri, ties, and network structures. The questionnaire used various instruments, such as a name generator question to investigate alter–alter relationships and network densities, combined with a network chart with four concentric circles to determine the role of the alteri in an ego's informal protection. (For more detailed information about the methodology of the project as a whole, see Barglowski, Bilecen, and Amelina 2015; on network analysis in particular, see Bilecen and Sienkiewicz 2015; on the technique of name generation, see Campbell and Lee 1991.) There was no restriction on the number of relevant significant others solicited.

To sample qualitative data from both sides of the border in a matched sample (see Mazzucato 2009), we conducted interviews with 10 significant others in each of the two emigration countries who were mentioned by the interviewees in Germany. In cooperation with researchers from the emigration regions, a multi-sited and mixed-methods research design was selected to address the challenges of essentialism, nationalism, and researchers' positionality (see Barglowski, Bilecen, and Amelina 2015) and to avoid "methodological nationalism" (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002). To gain a broader understanding of formal entitlements and protection, document analysis and expert interviews had been carried out previously in Germany, Kazakhstan, and Poland.

The study design as a whole can be described as embedded and simultaneous in the sense of mixed-methods research (see Creswell and Plano Clark 2007, 7; Small 2011) and as mixed in that the 40 qualitative interviews were part of (i.e., embedded in) the quantitative survey involving all 200 participants. It is a convergent parallel design because both the qualitative phase and the quantitative phase of data collection and analysis ran nearly simultaneously and concurrently.

In addition to the combination of different data types and embedment in the research design, this study used pluralism in describing reciprocity in the migrants' protective networks. Employing the same data, previous analyses with social science hermeneutics (Reichertz 2004; Soeffner 2004) showed evidence of the important role of reciprocity in protective networks (Faist et al. 2015; Sienkiewicz, Sadovskaya, and Amelina 2015). The aim of this paper is to

explore such findings in more detail by means of qualitative content analysis (Mayring 2004) and quantitative methods (descriptive analysis, correlations, and ordinary least squares regressions) in order to achieve a more complementary picture of (trans)national social protection and social inequalities using a mixed-method design, as promoted by Guarnizo and Smith (1998) for transnational processes in general.

In summary, this study uses social network analysis in combination with interviews and ego-centered networks and with both qualitative and quantitative methods. When studying social protection, it is crucial to look at social networks, because such protection is not only a relational social action determined by the dyadic relationship of one provider and one receiver; it is also embedded in a complex network structure (Bernardi 2011). Based on different characteristics at the network level (size, location, type of ties), the exchange of informal social protection becomes more or less likely. In this article, particular attention will be given to the tie and network levels and the participants' evaluations of reciprocity regarding informal social protection.

## 5. Operationalization

### 5.1 Informal social protection

Informal social protection was operationalized for three domains: care, financial support, and information. These dimensions were chosen because previous research showed their importance for social protection and support, especially in the migratory context. In simplified terms, to avoid a full-scale discussion of the very broad literature concerning these three dimensions of protection, the prominent range of subjects includes, among others, the care chain (see, e.g., Parreñas 2000; Yeates 2012), financial remittances (e.g., World Bank 2016), and information, such as about social remittances (Levitt 1998). The participants were asked whether they had received (17 items) or provided (17 items) any type of protection to or from an alter within the past year. Table 1 shows these 17 items, all of which are dichotomous variables, with “0” indicating no protection and “1” indicating that the ego provided or received protection in this area during the previous year.

**Table 1. Dimensions of informal social protection**

Information	Financial protection	Care
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job</li> <li>• Health</li> <li>• Education</li> <li>• Law (general)</li> <li>• Residence law</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular, more than €500</li> <li>• Regular, less than €500</li> <li>• Irregular, more than €500</li> <li>• Irregular, less than €500</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help in household (tasks)</li> <li>• Help in moving</li> <li>• Care in benign health cases</li> <li>• Care in serious health cases</li> <li>• Regular child care</li> <li>• Irregular child care</li> <li>• Elderly care</li> <li>• Emergency help</li> </ul>

This approach, which measured the actual flow of different types of protection in the realms of care, information, and financial support within the past 12 months, differs from most studies reported in the social support literature, in which reciprocity is measured based on a self-report evaluation of how individuals perceive the intensity of social assistance.

## 5.2 Transnationality

The operationalization of transnationalism and its related problems have been discussed by scholars working on migration to the United States (Guarnizo and Smith 1998; Portes, Guarnizo, and Haller 2002; Guarnizo, Portes, and Haller 2003). More recently, scholars within the European migration context have contributed to this field as well (Snel, Engbersen, and Leerkes 2006; Song, Son, and Lin 2006; Mau 2010; Bilecen and Sienkiewicz 2015; Faist et al. 2015). In this research strand, “transnationality” refers to an approach in which transnationalism can also be operationalized as a personal attribute or as a continuum (Faist 2013). Considering this argument, we chose to use a multi-faceted and dynamic concept of transnationality as a personal or group attribute. Understood in this way, a network can also have a certain degree of transnationality. Given that network data are involved here, the operationalization of transnationality on the network level is the “transnationality of the persons’ network”—namely, the ratio of relevant contacts living outside the emigration country to all the contacts mentioned, which ranges from 0 to 1, where 0 indicates no alteri living outside Germany and 1 indicates a network that consists only of alteri living outside Germany.

### 5.3 Gender and relation

Gender and relations (the latter meaning family or friends) play an important role in social protection, as can be seen in the literature on such issues as gender in transnational (care) relations (Parreñas 2000; Mahler and Pessar 2001). Similar to transnationality, “gender” and “relation” were operationalized as a ratio on a network level, with 0 indicating just male alteri with respect to just family members in the network and 1 indicating that the network consists of just females with respect to friend alteri.

### 5.4 Network size and density

The network structure (i.e., its size and density) was included in the analysis, because these features may influence reciprocity and the idea of helping and getting help in return (Purdam and Tranmer 2014). Network size indicates how many alteri were mentioned by the ego and influences the number of possible ties and the extent of social protection exchanged, for which a statistical control is relevant. Social control in very dense networks may affect the exchange of social protection. Network density<sup>2</sup> is operationalized as the ratio of the number of alteri who do not know one another (0) and the number of alteri who know one another (1).

## 6. Description of the networks

The sample included 199 ego-centered network maps<sup>3</sup> consisting of 93 female and 106 male egos with an average age between 31 and 40 years. Of these, 93 egos had completed vocational training, 53 held a university degree, 40 had finished secondary school, and 13 had finished primary school.

**Table 2. Characteristics of networks, including mean values, standard deviations (SD), and empirical spread of the items (n = 199)**

Network characteristic	Mean value	SD	Spread
<b>Network structure</b>			
<b>Network size (all)</b>	<b>8.09</b>	<b>3.426</b>	<b>218</b>
<i>Kazakhstan</i>	<i>7.00</i>	<i>3.180</i>	<i>2–14</i>
<i>Poland</i>	<i>9.19</i>	<i>3.320</i>	<i>2–18</i>
<b>Network density (all)</b>	<b>0.73</b>	<b>0.242</b>	<b>0–1</b>
<i>Kazakhstan</i>	<i>0.72</i>	<i>0.262</i>	<i>0–1</i>
<i>Poland</i>	<i>0.74</i>	<i>0.220</i>	<i>0.24–1</i>
<b>Network composition</b>			
<b>Ratio gender (all)</b>	<b>0.53</b>	<b>0.193</b>	<b>0–1</b>
<i>Kazakhstan</i>	<i>0.54</i>	<i>0.210</i>	<i>0–1</i>
<i>Poland</i>	<i>0.52</i>	<i>0.175</i>	<i>0–1</i>
<b>Ratio family (all)</b>	<b>0.52</b>	<b>0.262</b>	<b>0–1</b>
<i>Kazakhstan</i>	<i>0.54</i>	<i>0.276</i>	<i>0–1</i>
<i>Poland</i>	<i>0.50</i>	<i>0.247</i>	<i>0–1</i>
<b>Ratio transnationality (all)</b>	<b>0.24</b>	<b>0.272</b>	<b>0–1</b>
<i>Kazakhstan</i>	<i>0.17</i>	<i>0.263</i>	<i>0–0.88</i>
<i>Poland</i>	<i>0.31</i>	<i>0.267</i>	<i>0–1</i>

Source: Author's calculations based on data collected as part of the study

The 199 egos provided information about a total of 1,609 alteri. Mean network size was 8.09 contacts (standard deviation [SD] = 3.43). On average, the migrants from Kazakhstan had smaller networks (7.00 contacts [SD = 3.180]), with a smaller spread of reported alteri (2 to 14) when compared with migrants from Poland, whose network had a mean of 9.19 contacts (SD = 3.32), with a spread between 2 and 18 alteri. The network density for both groups was, on average, very similar, with a mean of 0.73 (0.72 for Kazakhstan and 0.74 for Poland), and can be described as relatively dense, as confirmed by the distribution. In total, 55 networks of migrants had a value of “1” for network density (i.e., everyone within the network knew one another).

The two control variables used for network composition (the ratio of family members to friends and the gender composition of the network) resulted in 751 male alteri and 857 female alteri in the networks.<sup>3</sup> The description of the ratio is 0.53 (SD = 0.193) for the gender networks, indicating, on average, a close balance within the proportion of diverging gender compositions. Two networks consisted of male alteri only (means value = 0) and six networks of female alteri only (means value = 1). There were 771 friends and 837 family members in

the network, with a mean ratio of 0.52 (SD = 0.262). In eight cases there was no friend in the network (value = 0), and in 19 cases the network consisted of friends only (value = 1).

The transnationality of networks shows that, on average, the ratio of alteri living outside Germany to alteri living in Germany was comparatively low. About one quarter of the alteri lived outside Germany, but the comparatively high standard deviation reveals greater heterogeneity within this item. In total, 408 of the 1,609 alteri lived outside Germany. The composition of migrants' networks from Kazakhstan was predominantly alteri who lived in Germany; these networks can be described as national networks. In 61 cases, all the alteri mentioned by the egos lived in Germany, with no contacts remaining in Kazakhstan or any other country. Migrants from Poland had more relevant alteri living outside of Germany. In 63 networks, at least one person lived outside Germany; networks were located in Germany alone in only 24 cases. These differences can be explained by the different migration histories of the two groups: migrants from Kazakhstan predominantly resettled with their entire families, whereas migrants from Poland were more heterogeneous and had various connections and contacts in Poland and other countries, such as the United Kingdom, which has become an important destination for labor migrants from Poland in the last decade. The geographical proximity of Poland and Germany also favors the maintaining of contacts and the exchange of protection.

## 7. Qualitative findings

Social protection is provided within and across borders. According to the social network analysis described above, the Polish–German space is characterized by a larger percentage of significant others living outside Germany than is the Kazakh–German space, which, on average, has fewer important contacts outside Germany, although the Kazakh–German sample is comparatively more heterogeneous in terms of transnationality (see also Bilecen and Sienkiewicz 2015). One interviewee, 36-year-old Vanya from Kazakhstan, stated that he was no longer in contact with relatives in Germany and never expected anything from them. Another interviewee, 58-year-old Tanja from Germany, mentioned a very close and regular exchange of emotional and informational support across the border to Kazakhstan. On analysis, however, the interviews with both migrant groups showed that if contacts outside Germany exist, they are considered highly relevant for social protection and emotional support (Bargłowski, Krzyżowski, and Świątek 2015; Sienkiewicz, Sadovskaya, and Amelina 2015). The norm of reciprocity can be described on the basis of those social relations, both within and across borders.

The following typology of the three different types of reciprocity, which is based on the typology developed by Sahlins, focuses on descriptions and evaluations of exchanged social protection across borders as a way of summarizing the role of reciprocity in transnational social protection. The findings are drawn from more than 60 interviews conducted among both movers and stayers in Germany, Kazakhstan, and Poland.

### 7.1 Generalized reciprocity: Financial protection and mobile social service

In all of the cases, the interviewees mentioned generalized reciprocity as the predominant type of protection exchanged. This dimension of protection involves no direct expectation of material return and is more diffuse, which is typical of personal networks. This type of protection can be observed often—but not exclusively—when life circumstances are more critical. Our analysis of the interviews showed some common patterns of exchange across borders, from among which “financial support for social service” will be presented.

In the Kazakh–German space, one pattern was an exchange of financial protection for social service. Financial protection is given to stayers (except when stayers remit money to movers) to support more substantial investments (e.g., for a cow or tractor) or medical treatments and care for the ill or elderly. Stayers used to come to Germany on an irregular basis to assist in home construction and renovations, to contribute to housekeeping (“spring cleaning”), or to care for elderly or sick family members. The stayers also maintain relatives’ graves and German cemeteries in Kazakhstan, while the movers support them financially for this service. When a relative in Germany dies, movers tend to invite the stayers to attend the funeral and to pay for their visit. Again, this shows the pattern of the nexus between mobility and protection: whereas the stayers provide more social services and are physically mobile to support their relatives abroad, the movers support the physically immobile, mostly on a financial basis, even though from a pragmatic and economic point of view, it would be easier for the movers to be mobile owing to their dual citizenship and greater financial and legal resources (visa regulations). For example, 65-year-old Ewald from Kazakhstan was supported financially and emotionally to come to Germany:

After [the death of my wife in Kazakhstan], I stayed [in Germany] for three months: one month with each of three families. Clothes, suits, coat. I came there, they [family members] dressed me.

After the death of his wife, Ewald was invited to come to Germany to recover from his traumatic experience and was reimbursed for his expenses. Similar dynamics were observed in

the Polish–German space. For example, “mobile grandmothers” move back and forth between Poland and Germany to support their families and take care of the grandchildren (see Bargłowski, Krzyżowski, and Świątek 2015).

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tween Poland and Germany to support their families and take care of the grandchildren (see Bargłowski, Krzyżowski, and Świątek 2015).

### 7.3 Balanced reciprocity: Parcels

In addition to phone and Skype calls and the reciprocal hosting of visiting relatives, sending parcels and photographs between movers and stayers is an example of the balanced pattern of social protection. The interviewees' descriptions of balanced reciprocity indicate some common cases in which the same type of protection is provided across borders (although sometimes to different degrees), such as the exchange of parcels. Interviewees in the Kazakh–German space reported both sending and receiving parcels. Goods such as clothes, toys, and sweets tend to be sent from Germany to Kazakhstan, while those in Kazakhstan tend to send natural medicines and Kazakh or Russian sweets not available in Germany to their mover relatives. In some cases, changes in the economic situation have caused the continued flow of goods to result in a glut of goods, as Viktor, a pensioner in Kazakhstan, stated in one of the interviews:

Look at my wardrobe. It is stuffed with clothes. The [children] came and took [them] back.

The exchange of parcels containing regional goods has considerable symbolic meaning for both movers and stayers. Also, in the Polish–German social space, traditional goods are sent to maintain the connection with the Polish culture, especially for the grandchildren in Germany (Bargłowski, Krzyżowski, and Świątek 2015). “Better” German laundry detergent (see Wagner et al. 2013) or napkins are sent to Poland or brought as gifts on visits. In this regard, the Polish–German exchange of goods differs from the Kazakh–German exchanges in that the migrants from Poland have greater mobility and return to their country regularly, whereas migrants from Kazakhstan rarely go back to their country. In Sahlins' definition, balanced reciprocity is less personal, something that cannot be expressed in an exchange of parcels, as described here. In some cases, however, the parcels can be interpreted as very personal and have symbolic value, such as the fulfillment of expectations in the transnational social space when Germany and Kazakhstan are being compared and movers feel obliged to provide protection to those in Kazakhstan even when financial resources are lacking. (For an extensive discussion, see Sienkiewicz, Sadovskaya and Amelina 2015.)

## 7.4 Negative reciprocity: Formal protection

Negative reciprocity, which, according to Sahlins' definition, is when someone gets "something for nothing with impunity," was not observed in the interviews. Of course, there are some types of protection that go in only one direction; an example would be when relatives in Germany translate documents into German or provide those in Kazakhstan with information about how to adapt to German customs. However, this type of one-way protection would not be considered negative reciprocity. Nevertheless, negative reciprocity was found in the quantitative questionnaire that sought information about the networks of protection among migrants from Kazakhstan. An office worker from an employment service and one from the Red Cross were cited as important contacts for personal social protection. In these cases, the interviewees mentioned the typical form of one-way protection in formal professional and client relations. Although Sahlins defines this type of exchange as the most impersonal type of exchange, the interviewees' perception of this relationship was different in that they referred to the workers by their full names and considered them personally very important with respect to their social protection.

## 8. Quantitative findings

### 8.1 How reciprocal are the networks?

As a first step, we sought to describe reciprocity within networks of informal social protection and investigated how reciprocal these networks were by exploring patterns within protection and reciprocity. To do so, we operationalized two of Sahlins' types of reciprocity in the following way: balanced reciprocity in social protection is when a type of protection is provided in exchange for the exact same type of protection (e.g., an ego provides help in the household and receives help in the household in return). The concept of generalized reciprocity involves correlations between different types of protection (e.g., an ego provides information about health and receives care in serious cases of illness).

On the tie level, we observed very strong correlations between provided and received informal social protection within the same item ("balanced reciprocity"). With respect to information exchange, all items correlated significantly with one another, starting with the lowest but still very moderate value of  $\varphi = 0.195^{***}$  for information about one's job and ending with a very strong correlation between provided and received information about education ( $\varphi =$

0.345\*\*\*). Similar to the findings for information exchange, the dimension of care correlated (at times very strongly) within the same type of care protection when we correlated the items for provided and received protection. With the exception of elderly care, all correlations were significant and started with  $\phi = 0.149^{***}$  for irregular childcare and  $\phi = 0.150^{***}$  for healthcare in non-serious cases to noticeably high correlations for help in moving ( $\phi = 0.361^{***}$ ), help in household tasks ( $\phi = 0.436^{***}$ ), and help in an emergency situation ( $\phi = 0.443^{***}$ ). For financial protection, the correlations were much lower compared with care and with information exchange and ranged from  $\phi = 0.063^*$  for greater regular protection (more than €500) to  $\phi = 0.140^{***}$  for smaller regular financial protection.

All correlations have the same direction and can be interpreted in the sense that those who receive protection also provide protection, and vice versa. It is a very clear and strong pattern observed for the ties, which indicates that balanced reciprocity plays an important role within networks of social protection.

Besides balanced reciprocity, other correlations between dissimilar types of social protection showed significant correlations as well, which can also be interpreted as more generalized reciprocity. Just to mention the case with the strongest correlations, the correlation between received help in the household and provided care in benign (not serious) health cases had a phi coefficient of  $0.320^{***}$ , and received care in benign health cases and provided help in the household were correlated with a phi coefficient of  $0.371^{***}$ . It is worth noting that correlations between financial protection and other types of protection showed only small or moderate correlations and were more or less unsystematic. One trend that was observed was that those who occasionally provided and received small amounts of money also provided more protection with regard to various types of information exchange and care protection. Between information and care protection, correlations between different types of protection ranged from smaller to higher. One pattern was that nearly all egos who provided or received information in the five dimensions also provided or received protection in the areas of household help, help in moving, and help in serious or benign health cases, as well as in emergency situations.

These general findings for correlation patterns indicate that generalized reciprocity also has an influence on the distribution of informal social protection within networks. For example, those who provided information about health systematically received more protection for all types of care protection. Thus, for those who actively exchange protection, there is not only an exchange of the same type of protection but also greater protection with regard to other types of protection. This pattern can be clearly observed for information and care exchange, but the findings for financial protection (except for the items for smaller irregular financial

protection) appear to indicate that financial protection follows a different rationale. One reason for this may be that financial protection does not necessarily require a person's physical presence (unlike the case for care) or an interaction (unlike the case for information exchange). The networks can be interpreted as networks of balanced and generalized reciprocity. On the basis of this descriptive analysis, it can be assumed for the multivariate analysis that the dimensions of care and information will have a major impact on provided and received informal social protection.

## 8.2 Reciprocity and informal social protection: Empirical findings

To examine the influence of reciprocity on the sum of provided and received informal social protection within the networks, three linear regression models were estimated. The first model included two indicators for the network structure (size and density). The second model consisted of the network structure plus three items that measured the different network compositions (transnationality of the network, ratio of family members, and gender ratio). The third model added to the network structure and composition a measurement for reciprocity within the networks based on three variables (care, information, and financial protection), which represented the sum of all protection received and respectively provided within these dimensions of informal social protection. The dependent variable in the first regression table is the sum of received social protection and in the second table the sum of provided social protection.

In all models for informal social protection that the ego received (Table 3), the size of the network (as one indicator of the network structure) played a significant role for the informal protection the ego received. Also, in the third model, in which the reciprocity variables were included, the size of the network had a significant influence. An interesting finding is that the size of the network had its own positive effect in addition to the provided protection, because it could also have been assumed that the larger the networks, the more informal social protection would be not only received but also provided.<sup>5</sup> The larger the networks, the more informal social protection is provided to the ego.

Density, the second variable used to measure the network structure, had one significant coefficient in the second model, indicating that the denser the network, the more protection the ego receives. In the same model, the coefficient for the ratio of family members indicated that the network composition had a significant influence on informal protection: the higher the ratio of friends within the network, the less protection the ego receives. However, both these variables (density and the ratio of family members) lost their significance after the variable of

network ties (reciprocity) was added to the model. The direction remained the same, but the size of the influence decreased, and the two reciprocity variables (provided care protection and information) showed a significant influence, indicating that the more protection the ego provided in this dimension, the more protection the ego also received. There is a clear pattern and a strong effect of reciprocity in these two dimensions that becomes particularly clear when the explained variance ( $R^2$ ) is taken into consideration. There is a comparatively large jump of the explained variance (from  $R^2 = 0.130$  to  $R^2 = 0.455$ ) between Models 2 and 3 after the variables for reciprocity are added, which shows the major importance of reciprocity in the explanation of informal social protection provided to the ego.<sup>6</sup> As was shown in the descriptive analysis, financial protection does not have the same effect as the other dimensions of protection, which have almost no effect on the ego's protection.

**Table 3. Linear regression model: maximum likelihood estimator – dependent variable = sum of received social protection (n = 199)**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<b>Network structure</b>			
Size (no. of contacts)	<b>0.879***</b> (0.304)	<b>0.911***</b> (0.315)	<b>0.385*</b> (0.133)
Network density	4.361 (0.107)	<b>8.090**</b> (0.198)	1.804 (0.044)
<b>Network composition</b>			
Transnationality of network		-0.088 (0.002)	-1.038 (-0.029)
Ratio relation (family/friend)		<b>-7.483**</b> (-0.198)	-4.279 (-0.113)
Ratio gender (male/female)		3.375 (0.068)	3.701 (0.074)
<b>Network ties: Reciprocity</b>			
Provided care protection			<b>0.557***</b> (0.346)
Provided information			<b>0.610***</b> (0.371)
Provided financial protection			-0.018 (-0.004)
Constant	5.563	4.673	3.655
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	<b>0.094</b>	<b>0.130</b>	<b>0.455</b>

*Note:* Unstandardized beta coefficients are shown, with standardized beta coefficients in parentheses.

*Source:* Author's calculations based on data collected as part of the study.

Table 4 shows the same types of models estimating now the dependent variable “ego’s provided social protection.” The only difference within the independent variables was that instead of provided protection, as the indicators for reciprocity, the models now included received protection. As with the findings described above, we see a continuously significant effect of network size, indicating that the larger the network, the more protection the ego provides. In addition, the coefficient for the second variable that measured the influence of the network structure on protection (i.e., density) showed positive and significant beta coefficients in all three models, indicating that in the case of provided protection, the more dense the network, the more protection the ego provides to the alter. The findings in all the models confirm the important role of the network structure for informal social protection. As in the case with received protection, we can see that the composition of the network does not play an important role in provided protection. The ratio of alteri living outside of Germany and the ratio of family members/friends or men/women do not affect informal social protection significantly in either a positive or a negative way. Surprisingly, the network composition had no significant effect on informal social protection.

**Table 4: Linear regression model: maximum likelihood estimator – dependent variable = sum of provided social protection (n = 199)**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<i>Network structure</i>			
Size (no. of contacts)	<b>1.008***</b> (0.314)	<b>1.033***</b> (0.322)	<b>0.532**</b> (0.166)
Network density	<b>8.951**</b> (0.197)	<b>11.367**</b> (0.251)	<b>6.667*</b> (0.147)
<i>Network composition</i>			
Transnationality of network		-1.981 (0.049)	-1.408 (-0.035)
Ratio relation (family/friend)		-5.311 (-0.127)	-0.313 (-0.007)
Ratio gender (male/female)		-1.117 (-0.020)	-3.954 (-0.072)
<i>Network ties: Reciprocity</i>			
Received care protection			<b>0.492***</b> (0.294)
Received information			<b>1.026***</b> (0.466)
Received financial protection			-0.044 (-0.008)
Constant	0.875	1.802	-1.822
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	<b>0.119</b>	<b>0.136</b>	<b>0.475</b>

*Note:* Unstandardized beta coefficients are shown, with standardized beta coefficients in parentheses.

Source: Author's calculations based on data collected as part of the study.



However, the coefficients for reciprocity showed the same pattern for both independent variables: reciprocity in the dimensions of information and care had a significant and important influence on informal social protection. The influence was comparatively strong, and the remarkable increase in the share of explained variance ( $R^2$ ) was valid for both received and provided protection, confirming the very important role of the norm of reciprocity in explaining the distribution of informal social protection in social networks.

## 9. Conclusion: Reciprocity in networks of informal social protection

Reciprocity is a crucial predictor of the exchange of informal social protection on the network level, both within and across borders. Generalized reciprocity is a basis for interpersonally exchanged protection, and balanced reciprocity is significant as well. Understood in that sense, the expression “you always get what you give” is correct, but it also means something more. Particularly in the dimensions of information and care protection, we see that those who give also receive. Balanced reciprocity can be interpreted here as an important factor in the distribution of protection. Our study serves as a multifaceted example of how social capital can matter. Social protection—as a network feature and therefore a part of social capital—is actually strongly associated with reciprocity, and social ties are part of social capital in which interests, obligations, expectations, and norm, such as the norm of reciprocity, are shared (Faist 1998).

The mixed-methods analysis showed different aspects of reciprocity in the exchange of informal social protection. It also became obvious that the combination of both methods alone allowed a deeper understanding of social protection. The qualitative analysis revealed different meaning patterns and experiences of inequality in social protection—e.g., the unequal “mobilization of the stayers” in the German–Kazakh social space. While most descriptions of informal support fulfilled the criteria of generalized reciprocal exchange, the quantitative analysis also showed how important a role balanced reciprocity plays in informal social protection. Following the work of Dankyi, Mazzucato, and Manuh (2015), we realized that reciprocity is not necessarily repaid in the “same currency,” as these authors described for care. The findings presented in our paper indicate the relevance of different logics of reciprocity (balanced and unbalanced) in the exchange of different dimensions of informal protection, such as care and information.

The qualitative analysis drew attention to the importance of transnationality on a personal level. There is an ongoing exchange of protection across borders, and not least the mobile

social service becomes possible through ongoing interpersonal attachments across borders. On the network level, it became clear that the ratio of contacts living outside Germany does not systematically and significantly influence the distribution of informal social protection in either a negative or a positive way. Again, this shows the universal character of reciprocity, which is not influenced at its core by spatial mobility and transnationality. Our findings contribute to the research on transnational social question and protection (e.g., Faist 2014, 2016) and “global social protection” (e.g., Levitt et al. 2015) by empirically demonstrating the crucial role of reciprocity in the organization of informal social protection. It also draws attention to different qualities of transnational social protection, such as financial support, which appears not to be as greatly influenced by the logic of balanced reciprocity when compared with care and information. Even though the data presented here show a low exchange of remittances, they still show the importance of such remittances for multi-locally organized families through a different mode of allocation.

At this stage, it remains to be determined what distinguishes those who give from those who do not. A closer examination of this question could then offer a deeper understanding of the factors that cause (in)equalities within informal social protection networks (e.g., by means of a multi-level analysis). Our results indicate that those who mention more relevant contacts exchange more. Perhaps certain personal characteristics on the individual level (e.g., gender, age, and personal attributes such as extroversion) may influence engagement in informal social protection. Further research should include these types of factors in multi-level analyses.

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## Notes

1. Like solidarity, the norm of reciprocity not only can have positive effects—in the sense that it increases life chances or resources—but also can decrease individual freedom and encourage envy in kinship groups (see Faist 1998, 219). However, this paper focuses on the perceived positive effects of reciprocity in informal social protection.
2. The formula for density is  $D = \frac{n}{N + (N-1)/2}$ .
3. Originally, the total number of cases was 200; however, one case was excluded from the analysis as an outlier, because this individual had a relatively large total number of received protections (141). With 18 alteri in his network, he belonged to the egos with the largest number of alteri, but the other two cases had a sum of 25 and 51 counts of received protection. To avoid a stronger bias, his case was excluded from the linear regression models.
4. One alter was the Red Cross, as a person who protects but has no gender.
5. When the size and the items for measuring reciprocity are in one model, both have their own influence, which also indicates that reciprocity really measures reciprocity and is not an indicator of a potentially larger number of possible ties.
6. To make sure that this remarkable increase in  $R^2$  is not caused by (multi)collinearity, the correlation matrix and the VIF test were used. Both indicated that there was no multicollinearity in the data structure, although there was a high, but still exactable, correlation for received and provided protection in the dimensions of care and information. The highest correlations we observed were Pearson's  $r = 0.584$  for the sum of received and provided care and Pearson's  $r = 0.637$  for the sum of received and provided information.

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